Social Media Literacy, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in Kenya

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Introduction

Kenya has experienced a cycle of political violence following a series of controversial elections that have centred on ethnic competition, leading to human rights abuses, deaths, destruction of property and a downward economic spiral. At the core of election violence, witnessed in 2007/8 and in 2017, is the positive and negative role of social media as used by both citizens and politicians. Political competition driven through ethnic belonging, ethno-political extremism and hate speech on social media platforms has taken centre stage. This paper concludes that while social media is being exploited in a way that contributes to violence, social media is also contributing to peacebuilding. The paper calls for a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach to education and sensitisation programmes on the positive use of social media for democratic consolidation.

Social Media and Politics in Kenya

Social media has been at the core of recent studies on media and political campaigns. There has been criticism that social media platforms such as Facebook have been used to capitalise on private data. In many parts of the world including Kenya, big technology companies like Cambridge Analytica have been caught up in the middle of electoral controversies. In the context of social media platforms, the new phenomenon of *citizen journalism* and *cyber-citizenship*, where the internet has given birth to *cyberdemocracy*, is both an exciting and a worrying trend. *Cyberdemocracy* is the participation of citizens in democratic debates online, spearheaded by online communities such as Kenyans on Twitter or KOT. Social

media has also been used negatively, leading to ethnic divisions and violence as witnessed in Kenya in the aftermath of the 2007/8 elections and in the 2017 elections.

Social media can play both a positive and negative role in social movements. It can be used to incite hatred, fuel ethnic polarisation in multicultural societies like Kenya, and build support for authoritarian leaders. At the same time, social media can be used as a vehicle to combat hate speech, spread useful and empowering information, and to support democracy and social change. Yet few civil society organisations, governments and citizens really understand how social media works.

Social media exists within the virtual space of "the attention economy" where user profiles are exploited for marketing purposes by business multinationals making the culture of global excessive consumerism and materialism acceptable beyond reasonable doubt (normalised). Consequently, it requires taking a creative capacity building approach to citizen participation, to positively use social media's potential in bringing about democratic change. For example, there is a need to counter meanings that are dictated by virtue of social media technical specifications, like algorithms and echo chambers, through parasocial interaction outside the scope of technology (offline). The possibility that people can encounter only beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own (selective reading) and may not consider alternative ideas cannot be helpful for politically volatile multicultural societies like Kenya.

In Kenya, a few civil society organisations[1] such as Internet Without Borders and Article 19 have openly questioned the role of social media networks such as Facebook in political transitions and believe that Facebook should be more open and collaborative in their ventures, such as those that seek to recruit local content editors. They have also criticised Facebook's engagements with government as being exploitative, for example saying that the company's provision of free Wi-Fi to poor communities is sugar coated as philanthropy. They have stopped short of expressing fears of content manipulation in favour of the State.

Critical theories of technology and theories of change point out that proper planning, participation and evaluation of social media use by critical stakeholders (civil society, government, citizens, technology companies and the international community) can help establish long term goals. In the case of social media, it can be used to foster greater understanding and democracy rather than promote hate and division. If this is achieved, then social media can effectively support peacebuilding in Kenya.

This calls for a greater understanding of how technology companies, as some of the most critical stakeholders, are responding to civil society concerns. It appears that in Kenya, technology companies and the government seem to read from the same script regarding the negative use of social media during electioneering. For example, in the case of Cambridge Analytica and OT Morpho Safran Data Company[2] in the controversial 2017 elections in

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[1] Nitasha T. 2019. After Trouble in Maynmer, Facebook Charges Ahead in Africa. Retrieved 05th May 2019 on www.wired.com/story/after-troubles-maynmar-facebook-charges-ahead-africa
[2] The data company took millions of dollars from the electoral commission to handle digital aspects of the 2017 Kenyan election, only for a third of the servers to fail days before the election. From that work, the firm keeps a copy of the Kenyan voter register as proprietary material. Myabola, N.2018. In Kenya, Election Manipulation is

Kenya, dis-information, fake news and propaganda thrived at the expense of robust civil discourse and genuine political participation. According to the Standard Newspaper, for example, a video secretly recorded and broadcast by Britain's Channel 4 News, indicated how:

> Cambridge Analytica (CA), a data analytics firm, deployed psychological manipulation to influence voters in both the 2013 and 2017 presidential elections….it mounted a sting operation in which it secretly recorded top Cambridge Analytica executives saying they could use bribes, former spies, and Ukrainian sex workers to entrap politicians around the world….Cambridge Analytica interviewed 47,000 people to assess Kenyans' fears, then used the information to engineer an online media onslaught against Uhuru's opponents.[3]

Civil society remains central to shaping the future role played by social media in positive cyber-citizenship, digital rights, democratic consolidation and peacebuilding.

Social Media and Post-Election Crisis in Kenya (2007/8 and 2017)

Kenyan elections, like elections in many other African countries, are often violent owing to ethnic polarisation and the winner-takes-all system of politics. Kenya ushered in a new constitution in 2010, after the controversial 2007 elections[4] that led to the deadliest post-election violence in the country's history. More than 1000 people died and several thousand others were displaced, despite much expectation, promise and hope for peaceful elections. Sadly, the country seemed to be returning to dictatorship judging by the State-sponsored media crackdown during the 2017 elections. As in 2007, mainstream TV stations were switched off by the Communication Authority of Kenya to prevent Kenyans from watching live coverage of the swearing in of the opposition leader as "The People's President," citing security concerns.

Even though the ban was challenged in the High Court, which revoked the decision, the government ignored the ruling, deepening the electoral crisis. It is during such electoral crises that social media has proven to be "an alternative medium for citizen communication or participatory journalism." Some scholars argue that social media has important implications for the process of democratisation in Kenya.[5]

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a Matter of Life and Death –Social Media amplify the threat caused by Cambridge Analytica and the rest of Africa's secretive political-consulting Industry. Retrieved 10th September 2019 from https://www.thenation.com/article/in-kenya-election-manipulation-is-a-matter-of-life-and-death/

[3] Wafula P amd Mosoku, G. 2018. Uproar over Uhuru Campaign Agency Election Tricks. Retrieved 10th September 2019 from https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001273907/behind-the-propaganda-machine-in-uhuru-win

[4] Khadiagala, G. 2008. Forty Days and Nights of Peacemaking in Kenya. *Journal of African Elections* Vol 7 No 2 p4-29; Ajulu,R. Kenya's 2007 Elections: Derailing Democracy Through Ethno-Regional Violence.*Journal of African Elections* Vol 7 No 2 p33-51

[5] Makinen, M and Kuira, M. W. 2008. Social Media and Post-Election Crisis in Kenya. Information and Communication Technology in Africa. 13 Retrieved 20th July 2019 from http://repository.upenn.edu/ictafrica

This policy brief argues that the conduct of the government in the 2007/8 and 2017 elections was characterised by fraud, violence and human rights abuses coupled with intimidation of the judicial system, social media users and total media shutdown. This left Kenya in a volatile situation regarding its democratic experiment, leading to dangerously emotional ethnic discussions on social media platforms that obscured the truth about the negative contribution of corruption and inequality to project Kenya (nation-building).

Corruption makes citizens dissatisfied with neo-liberal politics, as witnessed in the wholesale repeat election boycott in Kenya in 2017. Therefore, corruption remains the biggest threat to Kenya's democracy. Overtly, it may appear as if it is tribal politics but when covertly and critically examined, violence usually flares-up every electoral cycle due to electoral injustice perpetrated by corrupt politicians. State politicians exploit ethnic differences on social media using misinformation[6] and division for political mileage.

Such actions by State political actors call for more independence and robust truth telling from African media, free from state influence and control unlike the current media enterprise which is vulnerable to political and economic manipulation. The composition of this vision of the media is a controversial subject in media scholarship and is beyond the scope of this paper. However, in an environment where the media is largely influenced by the state, *citizen journalism* has become popular, replacing traditional journalism through social media platforms that represent the "will of the people". In such instances, social media becomes the "new mainstream media", an avenue and space in which Kenyans engage in uncomfortable discussions that could make them benefit from freedom and liberal ideas provided in a democratic political system. But at the same time, social media exposes the double standards and hypocritical nature of both the elites in Kenya and the international community who masquerade as champions of global democracy and human rights.

Social media can also be exploited by the State to create repressive regimes, evidenced in countries like Cameroon where mobile twitting capabilities have been shut down once for fear of revolution; Swaziland or *Eswathini*[7] where King Mswati has issued threats directed at the liberal use of Facebook and Twitter threats; the Democratic Republic of Congo where SMS texting was once disabled in the lead-up to the 2011 elections; and Ethiopia where skyping may lead to 15 years in prison. Social media can also be used to facilitate greater communication for groups that advocate violence. For instance, terrorist organisations in Africa like al-Shabaab have launched their own Twitter handle and use tools such as Facebook for recruitment, amongst other things.

Social media tools such as wikis, blogs, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter and Mashups were used to share information about the Kenyan electoral crises both in 2007/8 and in

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[6] Nitasha T. 2019. After Trouble in Maynmer, Facebook Charges Ahead in Africa. Retrieved 05th May 2019 on www.wired.com/story/after-troubles-maynmar-facebook-charges-ahead-africa
[7] King Mswati changed the name of Swaziland to *Eswathini* as part of the regional decolonisation discourse in Southern Africa today

2017. Discussion forums emerged on Flickr.com aimed at promoting peace and unity as did relevant video files on YouTube.com. In 2007, citizens approached social media as a way to get involved, particularly after violence erupted.[8] According to Thinkersroom blog 2008, citizens were determined to have a first-hand account unlike that being reported by traditional media. Kenyans chose to take active roles as citizen journalists, reporting on the ongoing situation and expressing their thoughts online in sites such as Mashada,com, Kwani.org, Thinkersroom.com, Afromusing.com, and Allafrica.com. "Social media generated an alternative public sphere which widened the perspective about the 2007/8 crisis"[9] and enabled a new kind of citizen participation to emerge which allowed for horizontal information sharing.

Bloggers criticised the state crackdown and blamed politicians in the aftermath of both the 2007/8 and 2017 elections for inciting ethnic hate speech, with remarks such as "Luo Mass Action" used to describe genuine protesters. Under the rubric of "digital activists", social media continued to play a critical role in instances where citizen reporters presented grass-roots views that were more diverse than those emerging from mainstream media. For example, Ory Okolloh who started Mzalendo (2008), a digital activists' website, states that her website "aims to open up parliament and demonstrate it is both possible and necessary for Kenyans to demand and expect more accountability from public institutions."[10] She was behind the idea of mapping violence across the country that was later picked up by Ushahidi.com. This enabled people to share information about violence and seek help through ordinary text messaging. Digital technology and social media can therefore lead to the development of people-centred early warning mechanisms such as crowdsourcing to empower people and communities to respond to threats. Kenyans utilised a wide variety of platforms for peacebuilding after post-election violence, including *Uwiano* platform for peace, Ushahidi, Facebook pages such as elections Witness Kenya and *Umati* or Crowd Monitoring Project, and the Sentinel and iHub project in 2017 called *Una Hakika* (are you sure?), a mobile phone-based information service to monitor spread of rumours and contain them.[11]

Using the experiences of the 2007/8 elections and the 2017 elections, this policy brief argues that social media is a double-edged sword which can be used both for peace and for conflict.

> Social media was used to incite hatred and violence during the 2007 elections where hateful and incendiary messages were circulated through popular social media platforms, leading to a call for regulation to stem the spread of hate speech. The same trend was witnessed in the 2017 elections. Social media technologies as used by

[8]Makinen, M and Kuira, M. W. 2008. Social Media and Post-Election Crisis in Kenya. Information and Communication Technology in Africa. 13 Retrieved 20th July 2019 from http://repository.upenn.edu/ictafrica
[9]Ibid
[10]Ibid
[11]Mutahi, P. and Kimari, B. 2017. The Impact of Social Media and Digital Technology on Electoral Violence in Kenya. IDS working paper Volume 2017 No 493

Kenyan citizens and leaders thus poses a threat to stability but also presents opportunities for peacebuilding.[12]

Some blogs, for example, were used as channels for biased and tribal information, and the spread of rumours and propaganda. In 2007, Mashada was used to such an extent that, owing to its inability to control the spread of hateful messages on the site[13], the moderators had to shut it down to cool the temperatures and put up a new site called "I have no Tribe". Similarly, in 2017, Facebook was largely used for ethnic polarisation, and the spread of disinformation and fake news. According to the National Human Rights Commission, during the 2007/8 clashes, mobile phone text messaging was a powerful tool for organising vigilante groups and mobs.[14]

Kenyans are increasingly relying on social media. Even though privately-owned media are quite visible and robust, their role is becoming increasingly questionable through relationships with elite politicians and businessmen who influence the agenda using propaganda. The most important issue is how social media has opened up space for citizen participation. Mobile phone applications have enabled citizens to share helpful information and to help relatives in risky areas. Bloggers have worked towards more transparency and information accessibility. However, the State, threatened by the increased level of liberty afforded through social media spaces, has worked equally hard to suppress opposition through draconian laws

In assessing Kenya's quest for electoral democracy, it appears the 2010 constitution was prematurely celebrated by the political class. It is applied selectively, without an understanding of what constitutes constitutional democracy. Constitutional democracy is about respect for independent State institutions that mutually co-exist to drive governance. Although computer and social media use of legislation is a welcome move, any policy should be created in a way that does not violate citizens' rights to freedom of expression. A better approach would be one that encourages self-regulative mechanisms.

The role of the most crucial state institutions such as law enforcement, the legislature and the judiciary should not be taken for granted. In fact, this is one of the questions coming up in the current clamour for a referendum. It is important to remember that, as happened in 2017, Kenya had a similar hotly contested election in 2013 that was petitioned in the Supreme Court of Kenya. The Court ruled that Uhuru Kenyatta was validly elected, a decision that was not well received among the local and international jurisprudence enterprise. However, the ruling paved the way for more advanced jurisprudence in 2017 that encouraged the Supreme Court of Kenya to nullify the election of a sitting President and, in strict conformity with the law, order fresh elections which the opposition boycotted.

Sadly, this landmark ruling was watered down when the same court failed to hear a crucial case a day before the repeat presidential elections on October 26 2017 regarding the legality

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[12]Ibid
[13]Ibid   .
[14] Jorgic, D. 2013. Kenya Tracks Facebook, Twitter for Election "Hate Speech". Reuters

and the implications of the opposition's withdrawal. The court failed to raise a quorum due to alleged State (executive) intimidation. Legislation introduced post-2017 such as the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Bill[15], some have argued, has impacted negatively on freedom of expression.

Ethnicity and the 2017 Post-Election Violence

It is well known that the media sets agendas[16] and validates some voices over others, such as when journalists quote renowned public figures when reporting, to satisfy the interests of the public. It appeared as if, in the 2017 elections, the State was targeting and profiling members of the opposition based on their ethnicity. The State used their social media pages to spread propaganda, terming spontaneous demonstrations "*Luo Mass Action*".[17] Repeat presidential elections failed to take off in many counties in Kenya, due to opposition boycotts citing failure of the electoral body to meet conditions on minimum reforms. When this happened, the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission seemed to read from the same "ethnic-profiling-script", singling out predominantly Luo counties as the only counties deserving repeat presidential elections. This was despite the fact that many other polling stations in several other non-Luo counties had also boycotted.

The 2017 elections and the attendant chaos demonstrate clearly how elites in Kenya benefit from exploitation of identity politics through media propaganda to incite violence leading to human rights abuses. The 2017 media shutdown should have been a wake-up call for Kenya's mainstream media regarding its watchdog role and a reality check for the State regarding the critical role of social media in cyberdemocracy.

> Social media presented an opportunity to report and document electoral related violence. Online monitoring through crowdsourcing enabled the identification of appropriate technologies and tools to track and analyse structural tensions, social divides and friction points. Using SMS, Kenyans have been able to report, map and document violent incidences on mass scale, providing information which journalists

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[15]An ACT of Parliament to provide for offences relating to computer systems; to enable timely and effective detection, prohibition, prevention, response, investigation and prosecution of computer and cybercrimes; to facilitate international co-operation in dealing with computer and cybercrime matters; and for connected purposes Offences Section III No 23 states that "a person who knowingly publishes information that is false in print, broadcast, data or over a computer system, that is calculated or results in panic, chaos, or false publications..., or which is likely to discredit the reputation of a person commits an offence and shall on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding five million shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years, or to both". Pp. 58-59 KENYA GAZETTE SUPPLEMENT ACTS, 2018 NAIROBI, 16th May, 2018 retrieved from http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/ComputerMisuseandCybercrimesActNo5of2018.pdf

[16] McCombs, M, L Shaw & D Weaver. 1997. *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontier in Agenda Setting Theory*. Mahwa, NJ: Lawrence Erbaum Associates;Graber, D A. 2000. *Media Power in Politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

[17]Luos are one of the dominant ethnic communities in Kenya with historical rivalry with the ruling Kikuyu and Kalenjin community since 1963. The Luo, led by Raila Odinga whose father Jaramogi Oginga Odinga was Kenya's first vice president and the Doyen of opposition politics, have always been the face of the opposition in Kenya since independence

could not ordinarily access through traditional means. Facebook allowed users to share experiences and witness accounts of elections.[18]

In addition, other sites allowed for the sharing of videos and information which enabled the mapping of violence and generated public attention towards preventive efforts by government and other stakeholders. However, it is important to point out that social media is not a silver bullet; this paper equally underscores the important role played by the other institutions such as the judiciary in democratic consolidation. Unfortunately, the media, social media included, failed to appreciate the importance of the 2017 electoral jurisprudence, and, as in 2007, it reduced the election to a two-man affair, that of Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga. The latter was framed as a perennial electoral loser while the former was presented as a 'digital leader'. The Building Bridges Initiative or "the handshake[19] between these two leaders, now enjoying local and international support, came as a big relief for many Kenyans because it brought an opportunity for national dialogue for peace and reconciliation.

Positive Use of Social Media Platforms in Africa

While social media may be exploited and can lead to state failure and civil war, there are at least four ways in which social media platforms can be positively exploited for conflict transformation in Africa[20]. This could also apply in states under conflict, fragile states and post-conflict African states.

1. Reducing civilian conflict casualties, serving as early warning systems, helping citizens stay connected to humanitarian organisations and keeping citizens secure in the aftermath of crime and violence. Ushahidi.com was born out of a blogger's plea to have access to real time information on political deaths following the 2007/8 post-election violence. A Twitter mobile-based violence reporting platform has been used to track crime and violence in Kenya through the Twitter *Baraza* [21], conflict trends in the lead-up to Southern Sudan's independence and incidences of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa.

2. Social media can be used for citizen mobilisation and mass movement for a common course that can lead to democratic transformation and consolidation as evidenced in the Arab Spring and Sudan Revolt.

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[18] Mutahi, P. and Kimari, B. 2017. The Impact of Social Media and Digital Technology on Electoral Violence in Kenya. IDS working paper Volume 2017 No 493

[19] Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyata surprised the nation and the world by the famous handshake on the 9th March 2018 after resolving to work together to solve ethnic antagonism, corruption, electoral conflict, marginalisation and inclusivity. On the 14th December 2018, the two were awarded a honorary degree for their leadership that led to the peaceful resolution of political conflict in Kenya by the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology

[20] Ramaiah, G. and Warber J. 2012. Four Ways Social Media Could Transform Conflicts in Africa. Retrieved from http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com 19th July 2019.

[21] Twitter Baraza initially made popular by a chief in Rift Valley to report crime (See Omanga, D. 2014) is commonly used by Village Chiefs, who are members of the National Government Administrative Officers (NGAO) representing the Presidency at the village level, in Kenya.

3. Social media can broaden the level of information sharing leading to transparency and a level of clarity about the truth. Twitter for example has been used in Uganda for clarity on the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) involvement in the historical conflict in that country. In Eritrea, it has been used to describe positive aspects of the country. (It is also important to note that the same social media affordances that allow citizen journalism and transparency can also be used as platforms for spreading misinformation.)

4. Social media can be used as a tool to galvanise transnational peace especially through positive media discourses, for example how borderland communities live in harmony, and it can be used to bring about a swifter end to conflict and as a tool to advocate for social justice.

Social Media, Alternative Voices and Change: "Virtual" People's Assemblies

The concept of a "*People's Assembly*" perhaps captures the significant role of social media in political communication, civil participation and democratic consolidation. The idea was introduced by the opposition coalition, National Super Alliance (NASA) after it rejected the results of the August 8 2017 presidential elections. NASA categorically stated that those elections results were manipulated to give Uhuru Kenyatta a computer-generated victory with the help of French company OT Morpho, which provided the Biometric Voter Register.

The salient issue about the People's Assemblies was that they remained predominantly virtual, as most of what was actualised following their formation was at the county level. Before the assemblies were called off to pave the way for dialogue/the handshake and the Building Bridges Initiative, more than 15 of 47 Counties had debated and approved them in their County Assemblies. However, the momentum of the People's Assemblies remained largely virtual, enjoying universal approval ratings by cybercitizens on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. So what were People's Assemblies? The People's Assemblies borrowed from Article One of the Kenyan Constitution which details the sovereignty of the people in the following manner:

> **CHAPTER ONE—SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE AND SUPREMACY OF THIS CONSTITUTION**
> **Sovereignty of the people.**
> **1.** (1) All sovereign power belongs to the people of Kenya and shall be exercised only in accordance with this Constitution.
> (2) The people may exercise their sovereign power either directly or through their democratically elected representatives.[22]

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[22]Constitution of Kenya 2010, p.12, retrieved 07th February 2018 from http://www.icla.up.ac.za/images/constitutions/kenya_constitution.pdf

When the assemblies were being launched in opposition strongholds, the government dismissed them as inconsequential. However, the significant public attention they generated nationally and internationally compelled the government to opt for dialogue. This policy brief argues that *Virtual People's Assemblies,* enabled through social media platforms, are a unique example of how social media can be exploited positively to bring about social change. The assemblies attracted hundreds of thousands of Kenyans who assembled both online and offline to hear their leaders and voice their concerns directly; more often, directing their leaders on what to do. Every time the opposition called for offline assemblies and increasing participation of cybercitizens online, surging numbers of people responded, creating pressure on the government.

The well organised and successful *Virtual People's Assemblies* created a predictable timetable that culminated in the well-attended self-swearing in of the "Peoples President" (Raila Odinga) at *Uhuru* or Freedom Park on January 30 2018. This paved the way for national dialogue through the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), and for calls for a referendum to address marginalisation, ethnicity, and corruption. Kenya's referendum call is pushing for the amendment of the constitution to create a parliamentary system of government. The virtual assemblies gave Kenyans, civil society and other stakeholders closure about their exclusive right to exercise their sovereign power under Article One as "the People", directly bringing an end to political dictatorship as envisioned by the Constitution.

Using the Kenyan example, the next generation of peacebuilding mechanisms in Africa may emerge from social media, as it is exploited by the civil society, government agencies and citizens as a tool for peacebuilding and democratic transformation during elections. Research on the role of social media and political communication in Kenya is paramount in order to come up with more informed responses from government, civil society and citizens.

For Kenya, it is important to understand what motivates ethnic discourses online and offline and eventually how response mechanisms can be made from a technical/technological, socio-cultural, political and economic perspective. This, we argue, is the context in which social media literacy programmes become relevant.

The government of Kenya, for example, has tried to come up with legislation in an attempt to police social media. As a response mechanism, this is difficult to enforce and open to abuse by State officials, compelling countries like Uganda to introduce taxes to regulate social media use. Uganda's parliament passed laws that introduced a new tax for use of popular social media platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Google Hangouts, Yahoo Messenger, Instagram, YouTube, Skype and others. The law requires users to pay approximately 5.20 Kenyan Shillings daily before they can access these platforms[23].

Some netizens have been arrested in Kenya for posting what the State considers offensive, with the State itself using its discretion on what constitutes social media offenses thereby

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[23] Kimuyu, H. 2018. Ugandans feel the Pinch as Social Media Tax Takes Effect. Retrieved 15September 2019 from https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Social-media-tax-takes-effect-Uganda/1056-4641062-15sojod/index.html

limiting alternative voices and working against the positive functional role of technology or social media platforms.

It is worth noting though that social media does not cause violence; rather it can be exploited in a way that inflames and exploits divisions, existing laws on hate speech not-withstanding. Violations of social media use, for example, take place despite the existence of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC)[24] which finds it difficult to secure convictions due to the multiplicity of platforms and information flows that are very difficult for government and non-state actors to regulate. Recently, the Kenyan government announced that administrators on WhatsApp groups would be answerable for any violation of the law by members of those groups when using the platforms.

The difficulty in policing social media users and content is a problem that calls for a more pragmatic approach. That the civil society in Kenya does not seem to have any social media literacy programmes targeting social media users should be of great concern to stakeholders who wish to have social media play a positive role in democracy.

The government, civil society, academic institutions and cybercitizens can collaborate to ensure that they each play a positive role in changing the perceptions of the public regarding social media. They can work very closely with other stakeholders and technology companies such as Facebook to ensure they educate social media users, accept criticism presented by technological loopholes on their applications. If they do so, they can begin constructing a new generation of cybercitizens or digital reporters who will work towards the positive use of the potential presented by technology through social media platforms for democracy.

Policy Recommendations

For the Kenyan Government

1. The Kenyan government should review punitive measures on social media, especially those that would interfere with the right to freedom of expression. The overall objective of this review should be nurturing self-censorship.

2. The government should invest in continuous training of law enforcers to investigate and prosecute where necessary, and collaborate with civil society, youth groups and technology companies to prevent misinformation. They should avoid being the source of misinformation.

3. The government should maximise its own use of social media to improve the state-society relationship, so the government can hear and respond to the concerns of citizens by listening to them on social media platforms devoted to addressing citizen concerns.

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[24]The NCIC is a statutory body established under the National Cohesion and Integration Act (Act No. 12 of 2008). Its primary objective is to promote national unity in Kenya and promote inclusivity through processes and policies that encourage tolerance, promote national values and elimination of all forms of ethnic discrimination irrespective of background, social background, race and religion (see Mutahi and Kimari, 2017).

4. The government, guided by the constitution, must partner with civil society and technology companies to prevent illegal use of personal data on social media platforms like Facebook as was the case with Cambridge Analytica in Kenya's elections. The move by Members of Parliament to ban French firm OT Morpho from operating in the country, after their involvement in the manipulation of electoral data in the 2017 elections, is highly welcome.

5. Politicians should stop using paid bloggers to spread hate, ethnic partisanship and divisive politics on social media for political mileage. The latter is often responsible for the never-ending cycles of ethnic violence.

For Technology Companies

1. Technology companies like Facebook and others should partner with government and educational institutions to conduct research on the role of social media in democracies to better understand how to avoid the negative exploitation of social media platforms.

2. Technology companies should be more proactive in policing content, especially fake or false news.

3. Technology companies should work with governments to sanction companies, like OT Morpho and Cambridge Analytica, which get caught up in electoral data manipulation and other controversies in specific jurisdictions.

4. Technology companies should partner with civil society and educational institutions to hire local or African content reviewers, and to declare the number of those reviewers. Social media literacy programmes could be developed that include how social media can be positively used for democratic participation through financing Social Media Literacy Laboratories in institutions of higher learning.

For Civil Society and Public Higher Educational Institutions

1. The civil society should work with government, technology companies and internet providers to develop sustainable projects that would sensitise and educate citizens on social media literacy and how to exploit social media responsibly to curb hatred for democratic change.

2. Civil society representatives must work closely with technology companies to guide content editors in order to edit out fake news and hate speech that sometimes comes from the government itself.

3. Civil society must remain vigilant in opposing the introduction of draconian laws that infringe on individual freedom of expression such as the case of the social media tax in Uganda.

4. The civil society should develop a positive peacebuilding message strategy for positive political persuasion using social media.

5. Public higher education institutions and research centres such as the Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security, Rongo University, should conduct research on the use of social media in Kenya and use the findings to develop a training manual, conduct training

workshops, and hold seminars with various stakeholders such as government officials and citizen bloggers. From these, policy briefs and journal publications on the role of social media in democracy could be published. In particular, these programmes should aim to engage the youth (cybercitizens) both online and offline.

6. Educational institutions should partner[25] with technology companies like Facebook to facilitate social data research on the trends, and the technical, socio-economic, political and cultural implications of their applications and their future cultural roles for modifications.

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[25]The Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security, Rongo University is currently engaging collaborative partners among them the National Counterterrorism Center in the Office of the President, National Crime Research Center in the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government, the Social Science Research Council under Social Data Initiative and the Royal Dutch Embassy, Nairobi to partner in the establishment of a *Social Media Literacy Community Incubation Laboratory* in the University for positive social media use, education and prototyping for the next generation of peacebuilding in Africa.

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